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Application of

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for

METHOD FOR ENHANCING HOST APPLICATION PERFORMANCE WITH A DASD USING TASK PRIORITIES

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

This invention is generally related to digital data processing systems and more specifically to the enhancement of the performance of certain host application using a disk array storage device.

Description of Related Art

A disk array storage device (DASD) provides large quantities of storage, now in the terabyte range for digital processing systems. These disk array storage devices comprise many physical disk drives arranged into logical volumes or logical storage devices. Significant efforts have been undertaken and are underway to improve the overall performance and responsiveness of such disk array storage devices to various applications that a digital data processing system performs.

One application class has emerged that puts a particular strain on the resources in a disk array storage device with a consequential reduction in host application performance. Such performance reduction reflects in the interaction of the application with users. Generally speaking this class of application is characterized by requiring a logical storage device to record, as a condition precedent to the completion of a transaction, information related to that transaction.

An e-mail server is one example of such host applications. Assume an author or sender sends a message to a list of recipients. Some e-mail servers respond by producing a write transaction to the mailbox for each recipient and to other locations, such as a "sent" file or folder. Each write transaction involves multiple transfers with a storage facility, like a disk array storage device. For example, the e-mail server in some e-mail systems writes a log entry for each write transaction directed to a recipient in the e-mail data base and for other transactions. Each log entry identifies the sender, the mailbox address for the recipient and the source of the message. In some e-mail systems this log entry is a first of two log entries and indicates that data is to be written to the specified location. After the log entry is successfully completed, the server copies the message reading it from its source and writing to the recipient's mailbox. When that transfer is successfully completed, the server produces another log entry as a second entry. The log entries for the transactions are important in the case of a system failure. In that situation, the log file containing all the log entries can be analyzed to determine which previous e-mail messages have been written successfully and resend any messages that do not have both log entries.

A single dedicated logical storage device, that may reside on one or more physical disk drives normally stores all the log entries for the e-mail server. Also each mailbox in a disk array storage device may either reside on its own logical storage device or reside with other mailboxes on a logical storage device. In such applications, the connection between the server and the disk array storage device is usually a shared resource, such as a resource that includes a SCSI interface. Once the transaction to write the log device is sent, the disk array storage device and server are essentially disconnected until the log device completes recording the log entry. Then the log device reconnects so that the host application can complete the transaction or continue to perform added task functions. Such a disconnection and reconnection also occurs with write transfers and certain other transactions.

In e-mail systems with many users, writing entries to the log device can produce a bottleneck particularly when a single e-mail message is written to a large number of recipients on an e-mail list so that a large number of write operations are directed to the log device. Response times increase and can become evident in the form of prolonged response times for the user of the host applications.

Summary

Therefore it is an object of this invention to provide an operating mode for a disk array storage device that enhances the operation of host applications in which a significant number of write transactions are directed to a single logical storage device.

Another object of this invention is to provide a disk array storage device that enables an enhanced performance of an e-mail or other like host application.

Still another object of this invention is to provide a disk array storage device with improved performance for handling applications in which a logical volume acts as a control with respect to other transactions and tasks.

In accordance with this invention a disk array storage device processes transactions with multiple tasks of different categories performed in the multiple logical storage devices according to the position of according task requests in a task queue. One logical storage device is assigned priority. Upon receiving a task request from any of the logical storage devices, this method determines the task category and logical storage device related to the task request. If the task request is for a task in a first category it is assigned to the task queue in a position having a first priority. If the task request corresponds to a task in a second category, the task request transfers to the task queue in a position having a second, lesser priority. All other task requests are transferred to the task queue at positions of a third priority that is less than the second priority.

In accordance with another aspect of this invention, the operation of a disk array storage device that processes transactions using multiple tasks of first and second categories performed in multiple logical storage devices is improved according to a method in which priority is assigned to one logical storage device. When a task request is generated for any logical storage device, its task category and the logical storage device to which it is related are determined.

Task requests in the first category from the other logical storage devices transfer to positions in the task queue of a first general priority. A task request of the first category related to the one logical storage device transfers to the highest priority position in the task queue. Other task requests transfer to positions that have a priority that is less than the first priority.

In accordance with another aspect of this invention, the performance of an e-mail application program operating in a data processing system with a host processor and a disk array storage device is enhanced. The disk array storage device includes logical storage devices that operate in response to task including reconnect tasks and second and third categories of other tasks. One logical storage device is dedicated to store a log. In accordance with this method, a task queue is maintained for different task requests that schedule the order by which the tasks are completed within the disk array storage device. Upon receiving a task request related to any of the logical storage devices, the method initially determines the task category and the logical storage device related to the task request. A reconnect task request related to a logical storage device other than the dedicated logical storage device transfers to a position in the task queue of a first priority. A reconnect task request related to the dedicated logical storage device transfers to a position in the task queue having the highest priority. Requests for tasks of the second category related to the dedicated logical storage device transfer to positions in the task queue of a second priority that is less than the first priority. Requests for any other tasks from the logical storage devices transfer to positions of a priority that is less than the second priority.

In accordance with another aspect of this invention the performance of an e-mail application operating in a data processing system of the host processor in a disk array storage device is improved. The disk array storage device comprises a plurality of logical storage devices that operate in response to tasks including reconnect tasks generated when a logical storage device completes a task, a second category of tasks generated in response to certain activities within the disk array storage device and a third category of other tasks. In the e-mail system each e-mail the creation of each new e-mail message will require a log entry in a dedicated logical storage device as a condition precedent to the processing of any transaction. In accordance with the method a first in and first out task queue is maintained for different task requests and schedules the order by which the corresponding tasks are completed within the disk array storage device. The system operates by normally adding reconnect tasks at the beginning of the queue and other tasks to the end of the task queue. However, in an e-mail system the system transfers reconnect tasks related to the dedicated logical storage device to the head of the task queue whereby reconnect tasks related to other logical storage devices are transferred to a location following a reconnect task in the queue related to the dedicated logical storage device. Task requests of the second category related to the dedicated logical storage device transfer to a position in the task queue that follows any reconnect task requests in the task queue.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The appended claims particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter of this invention. The various objects, advantages and novel features of this invention will be more fully apparent from a reading of the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which like reference numerals refer to like parts, and in which:

FIG. 1 depicts a network including a disk array storage device incorporating this invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of portions of host adapter shown in FIG. 1;

FIGS. 3A and 3B constitute a flow chart of operations within the host adapter of FIG. 2 to implement this invention.

Description of Illustrative Embodiments

FIG. 1 depicts a computer network 10 in which a number of users have e-mail capabilities. More specifically, the network 10 includes a representative hub 11 that connects to multiple servers 12 and 13 although any number of servers could be incorporated in the network. In this particular embodiment, the server 12 is an Exchange server running on the NT operating system. Representative workstations 14, 15, 16 and 17 connect to the hub 11 for access to the servers 12 and 13. The workstations 14 through 17 are merely representative; in fact the number of workstations attached to the network could number in the thousands.

A bus 19, typically with a SCSI interface, connects the server 12 to a disk array storage device 20. For purposes of explaining this invention, this disclosure describes a Symmetrix disk array storage device sold by the assignee of this application. FIG. 1 depicts a general configuration of the disk array storage device as including a host adapter (HA) 21 and a cache memory 22 connected over a bus 23. A disk array also connects to the bus 24 and includes a number of disk adapters and physical disk drives. FIG. 1 depicts, in particular, a disk adapter 25 with a plurality of physical disk drives 26, a disk adapter 27 with a plurality of physical disk drives 28 and a disk adapter 30 with a plurality of physical disk drives 31. A system manager 32 connects through one of the disk adapters, such as the disk adapter 30, for controlling the configuration of the disk array storage device 20, all as known in the art. Each of the adapters, such as the host adapter 21 and disk adapters 25, 27 and 30, operates under the control of a microprocessor based system.

As known, the physical disk drives in the array 24 are also organized as logical storage devices. In the Exchange e-mail application, that serves as a basis for the description of this invention, one such logical storage device is dedicated as a log device and is designated as the LV-LOG device in FIG. 1. Other logical storage devices are assigned to be mailboxes for individual recipients. FIG. 1 depicts a local e-mail system in which all mailboxes are located in a local disk array storage device 20. Pathways to other databases including remote databases by various known means are also possible. Such multiple database e-mail systems will also benefit from the performance enhancement that this invention provides.

The disk array storage system 20 is a task-based system. That is, in response to any command received by the host adapter 21, a microprocessor based control 40 in the host adapter 21 responds by producing a command sequence and various operations that require various tasks in specific sequences. Each sequence places an identification of the task and the identity of the logical storage device to be involved with task on a task request queue. Each entry in the task request queue therefore constitutes a task identifier and serves as a task request. We use "task request" in this description. Three specific tasks of a disk array storage device 20 shown in FIG. 1 are important to understanding of this invention. They are:

1. A reconnect task. When a host device, such as the server 12 in FIG. 1, writes to a logical storage device, such as the LV-LOG device 26, it sends a command with all the necessary information from the host device and then disconnects as quickly as possible. When completed, the disk array storage device attempts to reestablish a path to the host device. If it is not successful, it issues a reconnect task request;

2. A Start Command task. As a sequence related to a specific command terminates, it determines whether another command is present in a start command queue assigned to that specific logical storage device. If such a command is present but can not be started for any reason, a start command task request issues; and

3. A WP Ceiling task. Each logical storage device in

the disk array storage device has allocated a maximum number of write-pending slots in the cache memory 22. Each time a sequence in response to a command issues a write request, a test is made. If the write operation will cause the number of write pending slots in use by the logical storage device to exceed the assigned maximum, a WP Ceiling task request is generated.

While any one or more of these task requests may be generated each time a command is processed, it is characteristic of a writing operation to the log device, such as the LV-LOG logical storage device in FIG. 2, that all three of those tasks will be produced in response to each write transaction to a mailbox and other transactions that require a log entry.

Referring to FIG. 2, the host adapter 21 has access to a configuration buffer 41 with an entry for each logical storage device. The configuration buffer 41 may be located within the host adapter 20 or within the cache memory 22. Each entry has a number of information items pertaining to a particular logical device, such as a logical storage device identification (ID), a PRIORITY DEVICE flag, a WRITE SPACE ON flag and a WRITE SPACE MAX field. The PRIORITY DEVICE flag identifies the one logical storage device that is to be given priority over all other logical storage devices. In this particular embodiment, the LV-LOG logical storage device is the device that is given priority so its corresponding PRIORITY DEVICE flag is set. The function of the WRITE SPACE ON flag is set forth more clearly later. However, typically the WRITE SPACE ON flag will be set only if the corresponding PRIORITY DEVICE flag is set.

FIG. 2 further depicts a monitor module 41 in the control 40. This monitor module 41 takes the form of a program that operates in the control 40 to determine whether any task requests are pending for any logical storage devices or other devices in the configuration buffer 41. When a task request exists, the monitor module 41 places it on a task request queue 42 at a position identified by a task request pointer 43. FIG.

2 also depicts a task request generator 44 that represents the means by which various task requests are generated. Although shown as a discrete module, it will be apparent that such a module will be implemented in software. FIG. 2 also depicts a plurality of command queues 45. Each command queue receives commands from the host processor directed to a corresponding logical storage device. . The function of a priority counter 46 is described later.

FIGS. 3A and 3B depict the operation of the monitor module 41 in response to the receipt of a task request at step 63. A series of steps 64, 65 and 66 provide a decoding function by determining the category of the requested task and the logical storage device with which it is related. In accordance with this invention, one of the logical devices is designated as a priority device. To enhance the operation of an e-mail system, the log file logical storage device, such as the LV-LOG logical storage device 26 in FIG. 1, is given priority.

Reconnect task requests constitute a first category of task requests. In a disk array storage device as available from the assignee of this invention, reconnect tasks are always placed at the top of the task request queue 42 and positioned at a first or highest priority. In accordance with this invention, however, a distinction is made between those reconnect tasks from the priority device and those reconnect tasks from all other devices. If the reconnect task is related to a priority device, such as the LV-LOG logical storage device, steps 64 and 65 direct control to step 67 that sets an HOQ flag as shown in FIG. 3B. Control then transfers to step 70 in FIG. 3B that sets various pointers 43 to the task request queue 42. If the HOQ flag is set, as it is when the reconnect task request relates to a priority device, step 71 transfers control to step 72 that places this reconnect task request at the head of the task request queue 41, i. e., at the position of highest priority. Then the monitor module 41 performs various housekeeping operations in step 73 to restore any registers. Thus, any time the host adapter 21 in FIG. 1

recognizes a reconnect task request from a priority device, it enables the corresponding reconnect task to be processed as a next task in sequence.

If the reconnect task is from a non-priority device, control passes from step 65 in FIG. 3A to step 74 to begin a sequence that places a task in an appropriate position in the task queue 42. As previously indicated, reconnect tasks generally have a high priority. Consequently a reconnect task from any non-priority device is still placed near the head of the task request queue. Specifically, step 74 determines if the first task request in the task queue is a reconnect task request. If it is not, then control passes back to the step 67 and this reconnect task request is placed at the head of the queue just as if it had come from the priority device.

Step 74 then transfers control to a series of steps that analyze the task request queue 42 to determine an appropriate location for this priority task from a non-priority device. Step 75 determines whether there are any other tasks in the queue. If the non-priority device reconnect task request being processed will be the only entry in the task request queue 42, control passes directly to step 70 in FIG. 3B to place the task request on the task request queue 42. As it is the only task request, it will be the next task handled and, as it is a reconnect task request, if any other task requests arrive they will, with the exception of a reconnect task request from the priority device, be placed on the task queue 42 after this task request.

If the task request queue 42 contains task requests, step 75 transfers control to step 76 in FIG. 3A that determines the total number of task requests on the task request queue 42. Initially the number is greater than zero, so step 77 transfers control to step 80 that moves the task request pointers 43 to a next task on the task queue42. If this transfer causes the task request pointers 43 to go back to the start of the task queue 42, step 81 transfers control to step 70 in FIG. 3B. Otherwise, step 82 determines whether the task in the location identified by the count is a reconnect task. If it is, step 83 decrements the task count and control transfers back to step 77. If a task request is received and all the tasks on the task request queue are reconnect tasks, control passes from step 77 to step 70 to load the task request at the end of the queue.

If, on the other hand, there is a mix of reconnect and other requests, step 82 eventually branches to step 84 that places the task request in the task request queue 42 at the first position following any reconnect task connect. Thus, the foregoing process assures that any reconnect task request from the priority or any non-priority device remains at a high priority overall.

Task requests such as the Start Command task request and WP Ceiling task requests constitute a second task category. These tasks are given priority over other tasks, except reconnect tasks, but only if they are associated with the priority device and only if other particular conditions are met. Other tasks could also be included with appropriate conditions for other applications.

Looking first at a Start Command task request, steps 64 and 66 transfer control to step 85 that decodes the command and transfers control to step 86. Step 86 then monitors a condition as a condition precedent to any increase the priority of the Start Command task request from the priority device. In FIG. 3A this monitoring step 86 is represented as a "time to boost" test, and it uses the contents of the priority counter 46 shown in FIG. 2. The priority counter 46 controls the percentage of secondary category task requests from the priority device for which priority will be increased. The percentage is a function of the reciprocal of the number in the priority counter 46. That is, if every second category command task request should be given priority, the priority counter 87 receives a "1". If 25% of the task requests are to receive priority, the priority counter receives "4". Whenever the value in the priority counter 46 is greater than 1, step 86 transfers to step 90 to decrement the counter and thereby load the Start Command task request at the bottom of the task request queue 42. When the priority counter 87 reaches a 1, however, control passes from step 86 to step 91 that reloads the priority counter with its initial number and thereafter enters the procedure beginning with step 74 to place the Start Command task request in the task request queue in locations of a second priority just following any reconnect tasks.

As will now be apparent, if step 91 reloads the priority counter 46 with "1" the priority of all the second category tasks related to the priority device are enhanced. If the value is "2", 50% are enhanced. The number in the priority counter 46 will normally be "1" so that to enhance the priority of all second category requests from the priority device. However, the priority counter 42 provides a means for preventing these tasks from excluding tasks from other logical storage devices to assure even system performance.

A similar procedure monitors another condition as a condition precedent for increasing the priority of a WP Ceiling task request for the priority device. Steps 64, 66 and 85 transfer control to step 92 that transfers control to step 93 to determine whether the sequence should wait for write space. This depends upon the setting of a flag, such as the WRITE SPACE ON flag, shown in FIG. 2. As previously indicated, the WRITE SPACE ON flag will generally be set only for a priority device. In the flow diagram of FIG. 3A, the test of step 93 is not applied to non-priority devices. If the WRITE SOURCE flag is set, step 93 transfers to step 86. Otherwise the WP Ceiling task request is inserted at the end of the task request queue 42.

Consequently, this process gives priority to second category task requests, such as the WP ceiling and Start Command task requests, related to the priority device only if certain conditions are met. The "time to boost" test in step 86, applies collectively to Start Command and WP Ceiling task requests and is one condition precedent to increasing task request priority. In the specific case of a WP Ceiling Task request, the WRITE SPACE ON flag must be set as a condition precedent for a priority increase for that task request.

As will now be apparent, the priority device and other logical storage devices will only place one task request on the task request queue 42 at a time. However, certain task requests from the priority device will be taken up with enhanced priority by either being placed at the top of the task request queue in the case of a reconnect task from the priority device or immediately following any reconnect tasks in the case of request of the second category such as the Start Command and WP Ceiling task requests. Otherwise all task requests from the priority device go to the bottom of the task request queue 42.

It has been found that such a method for increasing the priority of task requests in the first and second categories greatly enhances the efficiency of the logging operation involved with such e-mail systems and enhances the operation of the e-mail system. As a result the number of simultaneous users of the e-mail system increases over these that can be accommodated without the invention. The degree of increase depends in part on the selection of the initial value assignment to the priority counter 46 and on a decision of whether to set the determination whether the WRITE SPACE ON flag.

This invention has now been disclosed in terms of a specific embodiment involving an e-mail system. It will be apparent that many other variations could be incorporated. For example, the four-way decoder comprising steps 64, 65 and 66 decodes each task to determine whether it is a reconnect task and then determines whether the task is related to a priority device. This is shown by way of example for purposes of simplifying FIGS. 3A and 3B. The reverse approach of testing first to determine whether the task request is associated with a priority device and then determining the task is a reconnect task is actually used. Similarly, other sequences of tests could be incorporated while obtaining some or all of the advantages of this invention. In addition FIGS. 1 and 2 disclose a system with a single connection to a host and a single physical disk drive that stores a log file. Some disk array storage systems may include multiple paths or ports to different host systems on different host applications. If multiple ports exist, the priority device will be assigned only for transactions from a corresponding port. Also in some systems, the physical disk drives may be configured so that the priority device appears as a single logical storage device to the host application, even though log entries are stored on multiple physical disk drives. The foregoing description of an e-mail system assumes that the log device will be the only priority device accessible to host applications. In some other applications it may be desirable to identify multiple logical storage devices or other logical devices as priority devices for enhancing host application performance. Performance issues for a specific host application will dictate the identity of a priority device or priority devices and the identity of tasks for each category.

In whatever implementation of this invention what is important, however, is that this invention provides a means of eliminating a bottleneck in certain operations when a particular logical device in a disk array storage device becomes overloaded and in which completion of transactions in that device are a condition precedent to other actions. In accordance with this specific embodiment, reconnect, Start Command and WP Ceiling task requests are specifically given priority. Other tasks might be given priority in other systems that operate in different manners. Therefore, it is the intent of the appended claims to cover all such variations and modifications as come within the true spirit and scope of this invention.

What is claimed as new and desired to be secured by Letters Patent of the United States is: